



Podcasting Demystified

Fred Dervin explains how
to use podcasts to enliven the
language classroom

We, foreign language teachers,

always hunt for innovations and new ways of motivating our students. There are several reasons for that: we need to make classes interesting, practical for communicative purposes and give a « we want to come back » feeling to the students; allow language learners to “identify” with what is introduced; facilitate learning; and most importantly, keep a foot in the learners’ reality by linking activities and teaching methods to our students’ interests and worlds.

Many new additions to Information and Computer Technology (ICT) have been very handy for language and intercultural learning and teaching: the Internet, Powerpoint, CD-ROMs, DVDs, text chat, Skype.com, videoconferencing, weblogs, etc.¹ One of the latest add-ons in the ICT realm is Podcasting, of which some of you have probably heard. This article sets out to explain what Podcasting is, give hints at how to use it with language users and review a few podcasts, which are useful in Language & Intercultural Learning and Teaching (LILT).

What is Podcasting and how can it be used?

Podcasting is a set of technologies for supplying audio or video programs over the Internet. The origin of the word is unclear.² Officially, it combines iPod (the Apple player) and Broadcasting. Podcasting allows anyone to post any productions made by themselves on a website (e.g. iPodder.com or Podcast.net) or a music software (e.g. Apple computer’s iTunes, Quicktime or Windows Media Player).³ Subscribing to a podcast or downloading it entitles users to listen to the programs when they want, where they want, and how they want. Any digital audio player that students or schools own (mp3 players, USB players, iPods...) or computers (Windows, Linux or Apple) can play podcasts.

Podcasts give opportunities for developing several aspects and skills involved in LILT. Podcasters create shows about anything: life stories, reviews, music, conferences, news... Since they are available 24h a day, updated on a regular basis by their creators, “authentic” and free, they can allow us to differentiate (by giving different tasks to learners), rein-

force (extra activities at home or while waiting for one’s turn in an office or on a train) and improve language and intercultural skills (comprehension, reading, and writing skills, intercultural awareness...). LILT can then happen anywhere and at any time of the day. Another important aspect is that podcasts can help to develop autonomous learning and motivation (ex. students can take initiatives and send e-mails with questions to podcasters). A podcaster delivers several “episodes” of her/his podcast every month and if the students are interested enough, they will continue to download the programmes e.g. at home. Finally, podcasts can allow (interdisciplinary) projects at schools and work on different know-how (synthesizing, summarizing, telling a story, recounting...). For example: geography, history or religion and modern foreign languages teachers can easily come up with “joint ventures” thanks to podcasts. One last advantage, which concerns teachers, is that there are more and more Podcasts on LILT didactics and they are very helpful for your own Professional Development (and motivation!).

abc’s of the podcasting jungle

To start searching for Podcasts is confusing at first because there are already so many on the internet. In order to make it easier for you to enter this jungle, I am reviewing below some useful and exciting Podcasts in different languages. I have opted for two categories: podcasts on “pure” language teaching and learning (linguistic skills: grammar, vocabulary, syntax, etc.) and life stories or Pod-witnessing (authentic documents on everyday lives of “normal” people and immigrants).

a. pure language teaching

General

- The first Podcast, mfilePodcast: Languages and Technology at <http://www.podcast.net/show/25772>, offers ideas and suggestions on how to integrate ICT in LILT. Each podcast has a different topic: e-Twinning, dif-

ferentiating for gifted pupils, working with language assistants, etc.

- <http://www.language.iastate.edu/main/podcast/default.htm> allows to “taste” different languages (French, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.) and explains why they should be studied. The podcast includes interviews of people who have learnt the languages.

English

- Words, language, and why people say the things they do in English by some language teachers at <http://odeo.com/channel/6260/view>.
- <http://www.yle.fi/multifoorumi/multiradio/zgo.php?z=20031221150739625262&g=8> provides an English language course for High school students in Finland (developed by Yle and the Ministry of Education).

- Language learners can increase their vocabulary at <http://veryvocabulary.blogspot.com/>. Words and phrases (at random) are explained in English.
- English Through Stories (advanced level): a story in several episodes about a missing person (scripts are available) <http://www.englishthroughstories.com/scripts/scripts.html>.

French

- The podcaster at <http://odeo.com/channel/3019/view> reads fairly easy and short texts in French on different topics for children and young teenagers.
- <http://frenchpodclass.libsyn.com/> has had a lot of publicity in the media. The podcaster (Sébastien) is putting up a whole course on French language and culture with vocabulary, videos, flashcards, tests, etc.